



CRISISWATCH

Tracking Conflict Worldwide

CrisisWatch is a monthly early warning bulletin designed to provide a regular update on the state of the most significant situations of conflict around the world.

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December 2017

Global Overview

DECEMBER 2017

Huthi rebels in Yemen killed their erstwhile ally, former President Saleh, and cracked down on his party, while both the Huthis and the Saudi-led coalition looked set to increase hostilities in January. In Syria, the regime and its allies ramped up their campaign to take territory from jihadist and other rebel groups in the north west, and the de facto leader in Libya's east disavowed the 2015 political deal, which could lead to more fighting in coming weeks. In Egypt, the military intensified operations in North Sinai against jihadists, who in turn launched more attacks. President Trump's declaration that the U.S. recognises Jerusalem as Israel's capital triggered deadly clashes between Palestinian protestors and Israeli security forces, and in Iran over a dozen were reported killed as tens of thousands protested against the regime. In Africa, Cameroon and Ethiopia experienced heightened instability, new fighting in South Sudan could escalate in January, and a ban on unrestricted grazing in Nigeria's Taraba state could lead to more violence between herders and farmers. In Central America, the political crisis in Honduras saw deadly clashes between opposition supporters and police.

Trends for Last Month

December 2017

Deteriorated Situations

Cameroon, Ethiopia, South Sudan,
Honduras, Israel/Palestine, Syria, Iran,
Yemen, Egypt, Libya

Improved Situations

None

Outlook for This Month

January 2018

Conflict Risk Alerts

South Sudan, Nigeria, Yemen, Libya

Resolution Opportunities

None

Trends and Outlook

In **Yemen**, the collapse of the alliance between the Huthis and former President Saleh's party initiated a dangerous new phase in the conflict. After the Huthis killed Saleh on 4 December and cracked down on his family and party members, the Saudi-led coalition intensified airstrikes, reducing immediate prospects for peace from slim to none. On 19 December, the Huthis fired another missile at Riyadh, which Saudi forces intercepted over the city. The Saudi-led coalition, in defiance of calls by the international community, maintained its partial blockade of Huthi-controlled territories with devastating humanitarian consequences. **As we have explained**, the UN Security Council should pass a resolution calling on all sides to agree to a ceasefire and political negotiations. It is the only way to avoid famine, the spread of cholera and further economic devastation. In **Syria's** north west, regime forces and their allies, backed by Russian airstrikes, escalated efforts to take areas in southern Aleppo and northern Hama provinces from the jihadist alliance Hei'at Tahrir al-Sham and other rebel groups, as international efforts toward a political settlement made **scant progress**.

In a heavy blow to **Libya's** peace process, Khalifa Haftar, de facto ruler in the east, publicly rejected the 2015 agreement that outlines how the country should be governed. Defying warnings from the international community, Haftar's move raises the risk of new fighting in the west between his allies and forces aligned with the UN-backed government. **As Crisis Group has urged**, to avoid escalation Haftar's regional and international partners must condemn his attempt to undermine the UN-led process and persuade him to return to the diplomatic track. As **Egypt's** military stepped up operations against jihadists in North Sinai, Islamic State (ISIS) and other militants launched deadly attacks on security forces and civilians, including one targeting Coptic Christians outside Cairo that killed eleven people.

President Trump's declaration on 6 December that the U.S. recognises Jerusalem as Israel's capital was condemned by the international community and Palestinians. Their president said he no longer accepts a U.S. role in the **Israeli-Palestinian** peace process. The declaration prompted protests by Palestinians throughout the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem, with several killed in clashes with Israeli security forces. It also triggered an increase in rocket launches from Gaza to Israel, and Israeli strikes on Gaza. As well as setting back the peace process, **Crisis Group notes that** the U.S. move is embarrassing for Arab leaders who have thrown in their lot with the Trump administration, and could prove damaging for Israel in the long term. Anti-government protests spread rapidly across **Iran** at the end of December, with over a dozen protestors reported killed in clashes with security forces.

In **Cameroon**, the Anglophone separatist insurgency gained momentum with hardline militants ramping up attacks on security forces in Manyu division, South West region. **As Crisis Group has argued**, the government's military response will only make Anglophones more receptive to separatist ideas. President Biya would better serve his interests and avoid immense financial and humanitarian costs by initiating a political dialogue with peaceful Anglophone leaders. Meanwhile, in **Nigeria**, a ban on unrestricted grazing in Taraba state set to take effect in January could lead to an escalation in fighting between herding and farming communities.

In **South Sudan**, fighting erupted in several areas despite the government and armed groups signing a cessation of hostilities on 21 December. January could see worse clashes since the government replaced moderate army leaders with more uncompromising officers and strengthened its resolve to confront rebels militarily and resist international pressure. In neighbouring **Ethiopia**, violence flared between ethnic Somalis and Oromos in disputed areas on the border between their regions; tit-for-tat attacks left at least 61 dead.

In **Honduras**, the political crisis triggered by November's highly contentious election continued, with clashes between opposition supporters and police leaving over a dozen dead and scores injured.

Latest Updates

Africa

➔ Burundi DECEMBER 2017

Fourth round of Inter-Burundian dialogue in Arusha, Tanzania 28 Nov-8 Dec produced no agreement; main opposition coalition CNARED (National Council for the Respect of the Arusha Agreement, Restoration of the Rule of Law) and civil society in exile boycotted talks citing their insufficient inclusiveness and lack of security in Tanzania. President Nkurunziza 12 Dec officially launched campaign to change constitution in referendum planned for May 2018 so that he can stand for more terms. Ruling party youth militia Imbonerakure 3 Dec destroyed hotel owned by exiled CNARED president.

➔ Cameroon DECEMBER 2017

Political standoff between govt and minority Anglophones worsened as secessionist insurgency gained momentum. In Manyu division, South West region secessionists clashed with security forces nine times in several places 4-25 Dec killing six gendarmes and one soldier, raising to seventeen the number of security forces personnel killed in English-speaking regions since start of Nov 2017. Commander of armed forces in South West region said several soldiers deserted and joined separatist militias. Elite army unit 14 Dec launched operation to recapture villages reportedly under separatist control. Separately armed forces reportedly killed or arrested and beat several civilians and torched dozens of houses in Kembong and Babong in Manyu division 20-23 Dec in retaliation for killing of security forces; allegedly pro-secession inhabitants of these two villages fled to Nigeria. 10,000 Cameroonian refugees reportedly arrived in Benue state in Nigeria during Dec, adding to 28,000 already in Cross River state. Boko Haram (BH) continued attacks in Far North, but at low ebb: insurgents killed two people and kidnapped one in Tchebe-Tchebe, Mayo Moskota area 1 Dec; kidnapped lorry driver on Maroua-Kousseri road between Dabanga and Tilde 11 Dec; double suicide bombing killed five in Amchide and Waballa 12 Dec; and fighters kidnapped farmer in Tolkomari, Kolofata area 14 Dec; killed one person in Goldavi 16 Dec, two in Zeneme 22 Dec and one in Goulkidaye 28 Dec all in Mayo Moskota area. Two suicide bombers detonated their explosives in Kordo, Kolofata area 29 Dec and suicide bombing in Bia, Kolofata area 31 Dec killed two people. Over 80 BH members surrendered in Dec, put in reinsertion programs in villages or military camps.

- **STATEMENT: Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: Dialogue Remains the Only Viable Solution**

➔ Central African Republic DECEMBER 2017

Fighting involving armed groups continued in capital Bangui and rural areas. In Bangui, armed groups fought each other in PK5 district 11 Dec leaving several dead. In centre-east, heavy fighting erupted between armed groups in Ippy early Dec and in N'Dassima 9 Dec. In north west, after new prefect took up post in Kaga Bandoro, ex-Seleka fighters 9 Dec burned part of prefect's office and fired rocket at UN mission (MINUSCA). Anti-balaka militia and Fulani-dominated Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation (3R) armed group 15 Dec signed cessation of hostilities agreement in Bouar, Nana-Mambéré province. Russia mid-Dec requested UN Security Council to make exception to arms embargo on CAR so that it could send weapons to equip EU-trained army soldiers; France and U.S. 14 Dec accepted but requested weapons' serial numbers to be able to trace them. International Monetary Fund 15 Dec decided to disburse third tranche of budgetary aid of \$40.2mn and approved request of increase in aid by \$55.1mn.

➔ Chad DECEMBER 2017

Sudanese President Bashir visited Chad 1-2 Dec officially to celebrate national day but in reality to shore up relations with President Déby; talks reportedly focused on security in border region and ongoing detention in Khartoum of Darfur militia leader Musa Hilal, father of Déby's wife Amani, arrested in Nov. Clashes between artisanal gold miners at Iri Bourgouri, Tibesti region in far north 25 Dec left some fourteen dead. At summit on joint force of G5 Sahel countries (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania) in Paris 13 Dec, Saudi Arabia pledged \$100mn and United Arab Emirates \$30mn toward force. U.S. Supreme Court 4 Dec allowed ban on Chadian citizens travelling to U.S. to take effect; U.S. delegation in Chad mid-Dec to assess weaknesses in passports to determine whether or not U.S. will lift ban.

- [REPORT: Force du G5 Sahel : trouver sa place dans l'embouteillage sécuritaire](#)

➔ Democratic Republic Of Congo DECEMBER 2017

Main opposition coalition Rassemblement failed to mobilise protest marches 19 Dec, one year after constitutional end of President Kabila's second and last term. Security forces dispersed protests against Kabila's rule in capital Kinshasa and other cities 31 Dec, called by Catholic Church-affiliated civil society platforms and supported by opposition, seven people reportedly killed. Parliament adopted electoral law 15 Dec, which Kabila promulgated 24 Dec. Unidentified assailants, presumed Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) militia, attacked UN troops (MONUSCO) in Semliki, east of Beni, N Kivu province 7 Dec killing fifteen Tanzanians and five Congolese soldiers. Uganda increased troops along its border with DRC and 22 Dec used long-range artillery and fighter planes to attack bases in DRC of ADF, which it accused of planning to conduct hostilities against Uganda; attack coordinated with DRC govt. Unidentified assailants night of 24-25 Dec attacked and burned home belonging to Kabila in Lubero territory, N Kivu, one policeman killed.

- [COMMENTARY: Three Critical African Elections](#)

→ Republic Of Congo DECEMBER 2017

Govt and representative of rebel group led by Pasteur Ntumi signed ceasefire agreement in Kinkala, Pool region in south 23 Dec to end fighting in Pool region. Ntumi “took note” of agreement 28 Dec but said that it did not take into account his “major concerns” and demanded creation of commission to “correct” text.

→ Ethiopia DECEMBER 2017

Following clashes in disputed areas along border between Oromia and Somali regional states in Sept and late Nov, revenge attacks by ethnic Somalis and Oromos 14-17 Dec left at least 61 people dead. Oromia regional govt spokesman said Somali militia killed 29 Oromos in Oromia’s West Hararghe zone in east and Oromos subsequently killed 32 Somalis. EU 20 Dec called for independent investigation into violence. Parliament 29 Dec announced formation of committee to investigate clashes between ethnic Oromos and Somalis. Regional officials said soldiers 12 Dec opened fire on crowd in Oromia’s Celenko town, West Hararghe zone, killing sixteen Oromos; region’s president condemned killings as “illegal”. Security forces 29 Dec fired on crowd in Shambu city, Oromia, attempting to stop lorries transporting sugar; one person killed.

→ Kenya DECEMBER 2017

President Kenyatta, reneging on pledge to remain open to dialogue with opposition on all issues, 12 Dec ruled out electoral reform and talks with opposition. Opposition leader Raila Odinga under international pressure dropped plan to be sworn in as president during independence day celebrations 12 Dec; govt reportedly said police would disrupt swearing-in ceremony and possibly arrest Odinga. Odinga 24 Dec said he would hold swearing-in ceremony in “early” 2018. Police 3 Dec arrested and detained overnight opposition strategist David Ndi. In Mombasa, leaders from former Coast province 17 Dec said they would swear in Odinga as “people’s president” and press ahead with plans to secede. Human Rights Watch reports released 14 Dec document widespread sexual violence around

elections 8 Aug and 26 Oct, mostly by security forces; Kenyan National Commission on Human Rights 20 Dec published report documenting 92 deaths and 86 cases of sexual violence over election period. Suspected Al-Shabaab militants 30 Dec attacked two police camps in Garissa county near border with Somalia; no casualties reported.

- **COMMENTARY: Three Critical African Elections**

➔ Somalia DECEMBER 2017

Security remained fragile in rural areas and capital Mogadishu where Al-Shabaab attacked police academy and govt forces raided home of opposition politician. Federal security forces 18 Dec raided home of former Minister Abdirahman Abdishakur, who ran against President Farmajo in Feb presidential election, and arrested him for treason; security forces reportedly killed five of Abdishakur's bodyguards during raid. Opposition politicians condemned raid as abuse of state power by federal govt; 96 MPs 20 Dec said they planned to impeach President Farmajo for violating constitution and requested parliament be reopened. After appearing in court 19 Dec, Abdishakur released without charge 21 Dec. Abdishakur refused to attend appeals court hearing 27 Dec. In Mogadishu, Al-Shabaab suicide bombing on police academy 14 Dec killed some eighteen police officers. Uganda 30 Dec said it had completed withdrawal of 281 troops from AU mission in Somalia (AMISOM), part of plan for 1,000 AMISOM troops out of some 22,000 total to withdraw by end of 2017. U.S. 14 Dec suspended military aid, mainly fuel and food for Somali National Army, citing corruption; PM Kheyre 16 Dec said move was joint decision. U.S. continued airstrikes on suspected Al-Shabaab militants, including 8 Dec strike in Kismayo which killed eight Al-Shabaab militants and 24 Dec strike in south that killed thirteen reported militants. Galmudug state govt and moderate Islamist group Ahlu Sunnah wal Jama'ah 6 Dec signed power-sharing agreement brokered by regional body Intergovernmental Authority on Development and Djibouti, expected to end three years of sometimes violent political competition; deal welcomed across Somalia and by international community.

➔ Somaliland DECEMBER 2017

Following 13 Nov elections, Muse Bihi sworn in as president 12 Dec.

Fighting erupted in several areas despite 24 Dec cessation of hostilities between govt and armed groups, and Jan could see worse clashes due to govt's removal of some moderate army leaders and strengthened resolve to resist external pressure and confront rebels. President Kiir 6 Dec rejected report by regional bloc Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) special envoy on consultations in lead-up to peace process revitalisation forum; he said that S Sudan was not being treated as equal IGAD member. Troika (Norway, UK and U.S.) 13 Dec said no conflict party including govt can have "undue influence or a veto" on process. Govt mid-Dec replaced some moderate army leadership with more uncompromising officers. Peace process revitalisation forum in Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa 18-21 Dec ended with govt and rebel groups signing cessation of hostilities which came into effect 24 Dec. Within hours fighting broke out in Northern Liech state in north. Clashes erupted in at least three other places and sporadic fighting near Mundri, former Western Equatoria state continued. Govt kept its own peace efforts on hold. Intercommunal fighting persisted in at least four places, killing hundreds.

➡ Sudan DECEMBER 2017

President Bashir visited Chad 1-2 Dec officially to celebrate Chad's national day but in reality to shore up relations with Chadian President Déby; talks reportedly focused on security in border region and ongoing detention in Khartoum of Darfur militia leader Musa Hilal, father of Déby's wife Amani, arrested Nov after clashes in North Darfur with pro-govt militia Rapid Support Forces. Bashir imposed six-month state of emergency in Kassala state in east and North Kordofan state in centre 30 Dec reportedly to support disarmament campaign.

➡ Uganda DECEMBER 2017

Parliament 20 Dec voted 315 to 62 in favour of bill extending presidential terms from five to seven years and removing presidential age limit of 75, which, if passed into law, would allow President Museveni to run for sixth term in 2021. Vote followed heated parliamentary debate 18-20 Dec: speaker 18 Dec suspended six opposition MPs

for refusing to take their seats and causing disturbance; opposition accused govt of intimidation after soldiers present in parliament building's prayer areas 19 Dec; and security forces 20 Dec clashed with MPs outside parliament building, preventing some from entering to debate bill and arresting at least two. Following 7 Dec attack on UN troops in DRC attributed to Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) militia, military 22 Dec used long-range artillery and fighter planes to attack bases in DRC of Allied Democratic Forces militia, which it accused of planning to conduct hostilities against Uganda; attack coordinated with DRC govt.

- **OP-ED: [Bit by Bit, Uganda Is Laying the Groundwork for Future Unrest](#)**

➔ Lesotho DECEMBER 2017

Regional bloc Southern African Development Community formally launched its Preventive Mission in Lesotho (SAPMIL) 2 Dec; force reportedly comprises 269 personnel from Angola, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Force deployed initially for six months to stabilise political and security situation following killing of army chief in Sept. Trial of five accused of this murder began 15 Dec.

➔ Mozambique DECEMBER 2017

Following attacks by unidentified gunmen on police stations in Cabo Delgado province in far north in Oct and killing of two villagers in same area late Nov, police 26 Dec said they would launch "terrorist hunt" in forests around Mutumbate, Cabo Delgado province.

➔ South Africa DECEMBER 2017

Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa 18 Dec elected president of ruling African National Congress, succeeding President Zuma and beating former minister and former African Union chair Nkosozana Dlamini-Zuma with 2,440 votes to 2,261.

➔ Zimbabwe DECEMBER 2017

Ruling party ZANU-PF extraordinary congress 15 Dec endorsed President Mnangagwa as party president and its candidate for 2018 elections. Army chief Lt Gen Sibanda 18 Dec announced return of military to barracks, formal end of Operation Restore Order and return of police to normal duties. Same day changes in military leadership announced, including confirming retirement of Zimbabwe Defence Force Commander Constantino Chiwenga and promotion of Sibanda to his position. Chiwenga and Kembo Mohadi appointed VPs 28 Dec: Chiwenga responsible for defence, state security and war veterans, and Mohadi for national peace and reconciliation. Four former ministers under Mugabe arrested for corruption: Walter Chidakwa 20 Dec, Joseph Made 21 Dec, Makhosini Hlongwane 28 Dec and Jason Machaya 21 Dec. Election commission Chairperson Rita Makarau 8 Dec resigned giving no reasons; no replacement appointed. Deadline for voter registration extended from 19 Dec to 15 Feb following calls from opposition and civil society.

- [BRIEFING: Zimbabwe's "Military-assisted Transition" and Prospects for Recovery](#)

➔ Burkina Faso DECEMBER 2017

Insecurity persisted in north: army vehicle detonated mine in Tounté, Soum province 2 Dec, injuring four soldiers; unidentified assailants burned down police station and police commissioner's house in Koumbri, Yatenga province 4 Dec; and attacked gendarmerie at Aribinda, Soum province 21 Dec. Opposition leader Zéphirin Diabré 8 Dec said he had filed complaint with judiciary against Interior Minister Simon Compaoré for illegal detention of firearms. Constitutional commission 27 Dec submitted to President Kaboré draft revised constitution which limits presidential terms to two. At summit on joint force of G5 Sahel countries (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania) in Paris 13 Dec, Saudi Arabia pledged \$100mn and United Arab Emirates \$30mn toward force.

- [REPORT: Force du G5 Sahel : trouver sa place dans l'embouteillage sécuritaire](#)

➔ Côte D'Ivoire DECEMBER 2017

Govt 6 Dec said it would retire and not replace 997 soldiers by end 2017 to bring army in line with “accepted standards”; govt reportedly plans to retire 4,400 soldiers over four years, paying each CFA15mn (\$25,782). Clash between ethnic Lobi and Yacouba over land in Man in west 1 Dec left three dead.

➔ Guinea DECEMBER 2017

Following clashes late Nov between Malian and Guinean artisanal gold miners over mining site in border area, officials from both countries met in Kankan, Guinea 4-5 Dec and worked toward border demarcation.

➔ Guinea-Bissau DECEMBER 2017

President Vaz 11 Dec invited signatories of Oct 2016 Conakry agreement to fresh talks on way out of political impasse, but African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) and its allies declined, requesting more information on agenda. Following mission in capital Bissau by ECOWAS regional bloc 2-3 Dec, ECOWAS heads of state at 16 Dec summit requested Guinean President Condé and Togolese President Gnassingbé to hold talks with all stakeholders within one month, and threatened “collective or individual sanctions” on those blocking implementation of Conakry agreement.

Following opposition Liberty Party claim that 10 Oct first-round presidential election was marred by irregularities, Supreme Court 7 Dec said it had not found sufficient evidence of fraud to halt process. In 26 Dec run-off vote former footballer George Weah beat VP Boakai with 61.5% of votes to 38.5%.

Signatories of 2015 peace deal struggled to implement its major provisions, as attacks on national and international forces continued in north and centre. Governor of Ménaka region in east 3 Dec confirmed that army and National Guard had late Nov begun joint patrols to secure Ménaka town with support from members of armed group Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA), splinter from rebel Coalition of Azawad Movements (CMA), and members of Self-Defence Group of Imrad Tuareg and Allies (GATIA), member of pro-national unity Platform coalition. Coalition of splinter armed groups (CME) 4 Dec demanded to be included in peace deal monitoring bodies, and threatened to block deal's implementation by "all means" if rejected. Attacks continued on national and international forces and civilians. Unidentified assailants ambushed National Guard convoy on Douentza-Gao road, Mopti region 3 Dec injuring two soldiers; abducted and killed five telecoms workers in Dianke, Timbuktu region 8 Dec; ambushed convoy of deputy prefect of Nara in Koulikoro region 9 Dec, wounding five soldiers and one civilian; attacked convoy of local leader in Timbuktu region 10 Dec killing at least six. UN peacekeepers 15 Dec repelled four simultaneous attacks on their positions in Kidal town; one peacekeeper wounded. At summit on joint force of G5 Sahel countries (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania) in Paris 13 Dec, Saudi Arabia pledged \$100mn and United Arab Emirates \$30mn toward force. Following clashes late Nov between Malian and Guinean artisanal gold miners over mining site in border area, officials from both countries met in Kankan, Guinea 4-5 Dec and worked toward border demarcation. After PM Abdoulaye Idrissa Maïga resigned with his govt 29 Dec, President Keita next day named former Defence Minister Soumeylou Boubeye Maïga new PM and appointed new govt.

- [REPORT: Force du G5 Sahel : trouver sa place dans l'embouteillage sécuritaire](#)

Govt and U.S. signed agreement 2 Dec authorising U.S. to conduct drone strikes against armed groups in Niger. At summit on joint force of G5 Sahel countries (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania) in Paris 13 Dec, Saudi Arabia pledged \$100mn and United Arab Emirates \$30mn toward force. Police prevented civil society-led protests against 2018 finance law 22 Dec, but several thousand protested in capital Niamey 31 Dec. Following reports of sub-Saharan migrants being sold as slaves in Libya, first 500 Nigerien migrants repatriated from Libya to Niger 8 Dec; govt said it would repatriate all Nigerien migrants in Libya.

- **REPORT: Force du G5 Sahel : trouver sa place dans l'embouteillage sécuritaire**

➔ ⚡ Nigeria DECEMBER 2017

Boko Haram (BH) continued attacks in north east and Fulani herders sacked villages in Adamawa state in revenge for Nov killings, while mounting herder-farmer tensions could lead to rise in violence in Jan following introduction of grazing ban in Taraba state planned for 1 Jan. Military 16 Dec said it had stepped up attacks on BH around Lake Chad early Dec, killing many and capturing 220. Twin suicide bombings at market in Biu, Borno state 2 Dec killed at least fifteen. Soldiers repelled BH attack on Mainok village on Maiduguri-Damaturu road in Borno state 13 Dec. Insurgents attacked military-escorted World Food Programme convoy 16 Dec killing at least four people; army reported six insurgents killed. Insurgents attacked outskirts of Maiduguri, Borno state 25 Dec killing four civilians, repelled by troops. Police 7 Dec reported indications that BH plotting to bomb federal capital Abuja and six states (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa and Yobe). Clashes reported between main BH factions loyal to Shekau and Barnawi respectively between Mafa and Dikwa towns, Borno state from 8 Dec; Shekau faction reportedly lost ground. After massacre of Fulani community members, mainly children, in Adamawa state late Nov, Fulani ransacked five ethnic Bachama villages in Demsa Local Govt Area, Adamawa state 4 Dec, burning down two; over 100 people reportedly killed, some allegedly by air force trying to disperse fighters. Presidency began consultations with relevant groups to end violence: VP Osinbajo 11 Dec met Fulani leaders, amid fears violence could escalate with planned 1 Jan introduction of grazing ban in Taraba state. Illegal miners resisted police attempts to dislodge them from mining site in Mayo Sine area, Taraba state 14 Dec, several reportedly killed. Intercommunal clash, reportedly reprisal for attack in Sept, in Ogobia, Benue state, left at least four dead. In Kaduna state, gunmen attacked Nindem village 22 Dec, killed four people; attacked nearby Ungwan Mailafiya village 24 Dec, killed six.

➔ Togo DECEMBER 2017

Opposition coalition continued protests calling for President Gnassingbé to step down throughout month in capital Lomé and other towns. Govt early Dec freed imams of Bafilo and Sokodé as well as some twenty people arrested for involvement in protests and invited political parties and figures for consultations 12 and 14 Dec on format of dialogue between govt and opposition. Some consultations took place, but opposition coalition rejected invitation, saying it would only take part in preparatory process mediated by Ghana and Guinea. Govt 18 Dec said ECOWAS regional bloc decided at summit 16 Dec not to designate foreign mediator.

Asia

➔ China (Internal) DECEMBER 2017

Govt criticised Human Rights Watch (HRW) report claiming that it collects biometric data including DNA and fingerprints from millions of Xinjiang residents for surveillance purposes; HRW said data collected through govt-provided medical check-ups. Associated Press and Wall Street Journal published articles detailing extent of surveillance in region.

➔ China/Japan DECEMBER 2017

During eighth round of High-Level Consultations on Maritime Affairs in Shanghai 5-6 Dec, China and Japan agreed to more communication between their defence authorities and made progress in establishing maritime and aerial communication mechanism to prevent incidents in East China Sea (ECS); terms of deal reportedly exclude mention of disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands and do not specify mechanism's geographic scope, agreeing that system will not affect legal positions of either side. Japan's cabinet 22 Dec approved record high defence budget that increases defence spending by 1.3%, including plans to purchase two U.S.-built anti-missile systems, and funds for new bases on Ryukyu (Nansei) Islands on eastern edge of ECS; Japanese defence minister said Japan will also deploy cruise missiles to deter invasion of islands. On 80th anniversary of Nanjing Massacre by Japanese troops 20 Dec, China called for greater cooperation with Japan to maintain peace, while Japan's chief cabinet secretary spoke of importance of looking to the future.

➔ Korean Peninsula DECEMBER 2017

South Korea, U.S. and UN imposed fresh sanctions on North Korea following its 29 Nov intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) test. South Korea 10 Dec introduced sanctions against twenty North Korean individuals and companies, largely symbolic due to absence since 2010 of trade relations with Pyongyang. UN Security Council 22 Dec passed resolution requiring countries to expel North Korean workers and restricting North Korea's access to refined petroleum products, crude oil and industrial machinery. U.S. 26 Dec sanctioned two officials it said were "key leaders" of North Korea's missile program. China and Russia denied reports they had been transferring oil at sea to North Korea in recent months in violation of sanctions. South Korea and U.S. 2-8 Dec held largest-ever version of their Vigilant Ace combined air force drill. Japan 8 Dec announced plans to buy air-to-surface cruise missiles capable of striking North Korea, and Japan's cabinet 19 Dec approved plans to purchase two U.S.-built anti-missile systems. U.S. Sec Defense Jim Mattis 15 Dec said North Korea's ICBMs do not yet pose "capable threat" to continental U.S.. During state visit to China by South Korean President Moon 13-16 Dec, China and South Korea agreed to establish hotline and issued four-point list of principles for dealing with North Korea crisis, emphasising unacceptability of war, commitment to denuclearisation of peninsula, peaceful resolution of North Korea issue, and improved inter-Korean relations; agreed to disagree about presence of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) U.S. missile defence system in South Korea. Chinese Premier Li said he anticipates "springtime" for bilateral ties with S Korea.

➔ Taiwan Strait DECEMBER 2017

Senior Chinese diplomat 8 Dec said China would activate Anti-Secession Law the instant any U.S. warship visits Taiwan; law allows China to use force to prevent Taiwan from seceding. Taiwan next day accused Chinese officials of repeatedly threatening island. President Tsai 28 Dec said Chinese military activity in East Asia is causing regional instability.

➔ Afghanistan DECEMBER 2017

Islamic State Khorasan Province (IS-KP) continued attacks in urban centres, including three suicide attacks on national intelligence agency facilities in Kabul 18 Dec and 25 Dec, latter killing at least five, and another 28 Dec targeting Shia cultural centre in Kabul killing 50. At least fifteen people killed in suicide attack on funeral in Jalalabad (east) 31 Dec. Amid seasonal lull in fighting, U.S. bombing campaign against illicit drug processing labs in southern Helmand province reportedly destroyed 25 labs 20 Nov-12 Dec. U.S. airstrike 3 Dec killed Taliban Commander Haji Naser; interior ministry reported at least three senior Taliban commanders killed in air raids in Laghman province (east) 24 Dec. Several al-Qaeda commanders were among some 80 militants reported killed during joint U.S.-Afghan operations in south early Dec. Taliban stormed police checkpoints in Helmand provincial capital Lashkar Gah 17 Dec, killing around a dozen. Former deputy IS-KP leader Abdul Raziq Mehdi defected to Taliban 30 Nov; IS-KP Laghman cell leader killed by Taliban 18 Dec. U.S. military late Nov reported it had conducted 1,400 airstrikes and ground operations against IS-KP since March 2017, killing over 1,600 fighters. New York Times 11 Dec reported U.S. dropped over 3,900 bombs and missiles in Afghanistan in 2017, three-fold increase from 2016. U.S. VP Pence 21 Dec made unannounced visit to Afghanistan. Govt's High Peace Council 6 Dec offered Taliban option to open representative office in Kabul for negotiations; Taliban declined. Amid growing U.S./Afghan frustration over Pakistan's failure to take action against Afghan Taliban inside its territory, U.S. military continued to bomb militants from Haqqani Network inside Pakistan. Amid deepening political discord, dozens of Afghan MPs and activists joined opposition meeting in Kandahar 2 Dec calling for more inclusive govt; Afghan govt reportedly blocked participation of most prominent officials. President Ghani 18 Dec dismissed powerful governor of Balkh province (north) Atta Muhammad Noor, who dismissed decision and refused to leave office, saying his departure would carry risk of civil unrest and insecurity; Atta Noor's Jamiat-e Islami party threatened to withdraw support from national unity govt.

- [COMMENTARY: U.S. Bombing of Afghan Drug Labs Won't Crush the Taliban](#)

➔ Bangladesh DECEMBER 2017

As Rohingya refugees continued to cross into Bangladesh from Myanmar (see Myanmar), EU High Representative Federica Mogherini 12 Dec said repatriation deal agreed by govt and Myanmar 23 Nov is “first step” in right direction but must be “monitored extremely carefully” by international community. Concerns continued that practical details of deal, including verification process, make refugees' return difficult; during visit to Dhaka by Myanmar delegation, Bangladesh and Myanmar 19 Dec formed joint working group on repatriation to start return of Rohingya refugees late Jan. Amid renewed public discussion about enforced disappearances, including alleged

role of Bangladeshi govt, ex-ambassador to Vietnam under former BNP administration Maroof Zaman went missing in Dhaka 4 Dec and remains traceless. Counter-terrorism officials 14 Dec said they had arrested Abdus Samad, cofounder of Islamic State (ISIS)-linked “neo-Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh”, accused of orchestrating July 2016 café attack in Dhaka. High court 27 Nov confirmed death penalty for 139 of 152 convicted in Feb 2009 paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles mutiny case.

- **REPORT: Myanmar’s Rohingya Crisis Enters a Dangerous New Phase**

➔ India (Non-Kashmir) DECEMBER 2017

In Gadchiroli district, Maharashtra state, police 6 Dec reported they killed seven suspected Maoist rebels; suspected rebels 21 Dec reportedly killed alleged police informer. Police 14 Dec said they killed at least eight Maoist rebels during raid in Bhadradi Kothagudem district, Telangana state. Maoist rebels 10 Dec allegedly shot man they accused of being police informer in Odisha state’s Malkangiri district.

➔ Kashmir DECEMBER 2017

Pakistan 7 Dec accused Indian forces of firing on funeral in Poonch district in Pakistani-administered Kashmir, killing two people and injuring one; military claimed to have killed Indian soldier in retaliatory fire. Several Indian and Pakistani soldiers reported killed by firing across Line of Control including on 23 and 25 Dec. Indian army 16 Dec allegedly killed taxi driver during night ambush against reported militants, triggering protests next day in Indian-administered Kashmir’s Kupwara district; army said civilian was killed in crossfire. Police 19 Dec killed two suspected militants in Shopian district of Indian-administered Kashmir; clash sparked anti-India protests, during which one person was killed. Security forces reported they killed Noor Mohammad Tantray, senior member of Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) militant group 26 Dec, prompting further violent protests. Govt released three separatist leaders from jail 25-27 Dec. Five Indian security forces and three suspected militants reported killed in raid on base in Lethpora, south of Srinagar (southern Kashmir) 31 Dec. Reports of over 200 militants, around 80 security forces and at least 57 civilians killed in 2017 make it deadliest year since 2010. Pakistan 8 Dec said it would allow meeting between detained alleged Indian spy Kulbuhshan Jhadav and his wife and mother in Islamabad 25 Dec. Raza Mahmood, social activist working on India-Pakistan civil society dialogues, disappeared from his home in Lahore 2 Dec, allegedly at hands of military’s intelligence agencies. India expressed outrage over Pakistan court’s late Nov release from house arrest of Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT)/Jama'at-ud-Da'wah chief Hafez Saeed, allegedly involved in

2008 Mumbai terror attacks.

➔ Nepal DECEMBER 2017

Final phase of first federal and provincial elections under 2015 constitution completed 7 Dec across remaining 45 (of 75) districts with 67% turnout; first phase held 26 Nov. “Leftist alliance” of CPN (UML) and CPN (Maoist Center) emerged strongest with ruling Nepali Congress (NC) suffering heavy setbacks. UML won 44% of all seats in lower house of parliament; CPN (Maoist Center) won 19%; NC won only 22% of 275 total seats. In provincial polls, UML-Maoist alliance won control of provincial governments in six of seven provinces. Madhesi parties – which won 12% of seats in national elections – will lead eastern Tarai province. PM Sher Bahadur Deuba resisted calls to resign from presidency of NC despite party’s poor showing and despite losses for several high-ranking NC leaders. UML Chair KP Oli hailed leftist alliance victory as opportunity for stable governance; UML and Maoist leaders in ongoing discussions on cabinet appointments and proposed merger of two parties. President Bidya Bhandari 29 Dec approved contentious electoral legislation following weeks of disputes between UML and NC over modalities to elect upper house of parliament that hindered efforts to form new govt.

➔ Pakistan DECEMBER 2017

Protests in Lahore, led by faction of radical Bareilvi party Tehreek-i-Labaik Ya Rasool Allah (or Labaik) seeking resignation of Punjab Law Minister Rana Sanaullah for comments perceived to be sympathetic to minority Ahmadi sect, ended 1 Dec after Punjab govt reportedly agreed to reconsider restrictions on use of loudspeakers by mosques, and allow for review of Punjab education curriculum’s religious content; govt refused to dismiss Sanaullah. Followed late Nov protests led by Labaik demanding removal of Law Minister Zahid Hamid. Govt’s capitulation to protesters’ demands fuelled concerns that hardline Islamist parties will play more assertive and aggressive role, undermining ruling Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and other mainstream parties ahead of July 2018 general elections. Jihadist and militant attacks included: in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)’s Peshawar (north west), Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) suicide bombers 1 Dec stormed Agricultural Training Institute campus, killing at least nine. In FATA’s North Waziristan agency, explosive device targeting army vehicle killed at least six 5 Dec; suspected militants 12 Dec attacked army patrol, killing two soldiers. In Mohmand agency, suspected militants 22 Dec killed three Frontier Corps personnel from Afghan side of border. In Balochistan (west), unclaimed attack on military-run railway construction in Harnai district 5 Dec killed three; Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP) claimed 17 Dec suicide bombing in Christian church in provincial capital Quetta that killed nine and injured over

50. Over 300 Baloch separatist militants, including seventeen commanders, surrendered to govt forces in Quetta 9 Dec. Amid growing U.S./Afghan frustration over Pakistan's failure to take action against Afghan Taliban inside its territory, U.S. military continued to bomb militants from Haqqani Network inside Pakistan. Muhammad Saeed, alleged mastermind behind 2008 Mumbai attacks and leader of Jamaat-ud-Dawa (formerly Lashkar-e-Tayyba), 3 Dec announced plan to run in 2018 elections under Milli Muslim League (MML) banner. Supreme Court 15 Dec found Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) leader Imran Khan not guilty of failing to declare overseas business assets, but disqualified PTI Secretary General Jehangir Khan Tareen from elected office for life over failure to declare assets in his electoral nomination form.

➔ Sri Lanka DECEMBER 2017

Political parties engaged in negotiations over alliances ahead of nominations for 341 local govt bodies ahead of local elections, which Election Commission 18 Dec said will be held 10 Feb. Despite widespread speculation that opposing factions of Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) may reunify to jointly contest poll, both factions submitted separate lists of nominees for 93 bodies on 14 Dec deadline. Opposition SLFP faction will contest poll with some other opposition parties as Sri Lanka People's Party (SLPP) under former President Rajapaksa; and United National Party (UNP), current governing partner of President Rajapaksa's ruling SLFP faction, will contest poll in coalition with several small parties under banner of United National Front. Election Commission 14 Dec rejected 23 lists of nominees for technical faults and not meeting new women's quota, which requires that a quarter of nominees be women; received nominations for remaining 248 bodies 18-21 Dec, accepted 1,553 and rejected 29. Colombo high court 12 Dec issued third order preventing police arresting former Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa for financial misappropriation; Buddhist religious leaders previously threatened protests if he is arrested. UN working group on arbitrary detention 15 Dec urged govt to repeal Prevention of Terrorism Act and replace it with law which meets international human rights standards.

➔ Cambodia DECEMBER 2017

PM Hun Sen's crackdown on dissent, launched in August, continued, with civil society groups, unions, NGOs and media facing increasing pressure and harassment from authorities, prompting further international condemnation. U.S. 7 Dec announced visa restrictions on officials it deems involved in "undermining democracy"; UN special rapporteur on human rights called for end to pressure on civil society and restoration of multiparty democracy; EU 12 Dec suspended funding for general election scheduled for July 2018. Electoral commission late Dec said China

had committed to provide equipment for July election following withdrawal of EU and U.S. support. U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Southeast Asia Patrick Murphy visited Phnom Penh 13 Dec, did not meet with any ministers; said still time for govt to reverse course and hold free and fair general election; denied allegations by PM Hun Sen and other senior officials that U.S. backed plot to bring down Cambodian govt. European Parliament 14 Dec passed resolution urging European External Action Service and European Commission to consider visa sanctions and freezing assets of officials involved in dissolution of opposition Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP). Ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) early Dec claimed 90% of dissolved CNRP's 5,007 seats at commune level, now holds over 95% of seats at commune level. Govt late Nov pressured former CNRP members at commune level to join CPP; Hun Sen urged party members to "break the legs" of defunct CNRP.

➔ Indonesia DECEMBER 2017

Hardline Islamists 2 Dec assembled at National Monument (Monas) in Jakarta to observe one-year anniversary of Aksi Bela Islam 212, or Action to Defend Islam, which called for formal charges against then-Jakarta Governor Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama for "blasphemous" comments. Jakarta's new governor, Anies Baswedan, came under fire for attending rally day after he misled media over giving his approval for event. Indonesia's largest Muslim organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) 4 Dec warned that politicians who use Islam to win votes inevitably end up discriminating against minorities and provoking intolerance that can lead to religious conflict. President Widodo strongly denounced U.S. President Trump's decision to recognise Jerusalem as capital of Israel, which prompted protests outside U.S. embassy. Indonesian security forces 9-11 Dec arrested nineteen people allegedly linked with Islamic State (ISIS) in East Java, Pekanbaru, and South Sumatra province.

➔ Malaysia DECEMBER 2017

Govt 7 Dec condemned U.S. decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital, saying it would complicate efforts to combat international terrorism. Defence minister 9 Dec said armed forces would be willing to provide assistance to Palestine. Govt clarified that U.S.-Malaysia bilateral relations will not be affected.

Médecins Sans Frontières survey of Bangladesh camps holding Myanmar Rohingya refugees 14 Dec estimated over 11,000 people died in northern Rakhine in initial month following attacks 25 Aug; 8,170 deaths due to violence, mostly gunshots, including 1,247 children under five. International Organisation for Migration 17 Dec estimated number of Rohingya arrivals in Bangladesh since 25 Aug at 655,000. Human Rights Watch 18 Dec issued analysis of new satellite imagery showing burning of buildings had continued in 40 Rohingya villages from Oct to 2 Dec. President 8 Dec appointed a new advisory board on Rakhine state, comprising five international and five local personalities; said it hopes to convene meeting of group with govt Committee for Implementation of the Recommendations on Rakhine state in Jan. High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, addressing special session of UN Human Rights Council 5 Dec, stated he could not rule out presence of "elements of genocide" in govt response to Aug attacks, called for UN General Assembly to establish "new impartial and independent mechanism... to assist individual criminal investigations of those responsible". In BBC interview Hussein warned situation could get "much worse". United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) armed group umbrella organisation 11 Dec requested meetings with Aung San Suu Kyi and Commander-in-Chief to unblock stalled peace negotiations; next peace conference now planned end-Jan/Feb. Kachin Independence Organisation armed group reported clashes with govt forces in Tanai (Kachin state) throughout Nov and attacks on positions near Laiza HQ in Dec. Yangon police 12 Dec arrested two Reuters journalists reportedly writing story on military abuses in Rakhine state; pair charged under Official Secrets Act for possession of internal military documents, prompting international expressions of concern over press freedom. Free Expression Myanmar NGO released report 11 Dec warning that another law, on criminal defamation, was being increasingly used to stifle dissent.

- **OP-ED: Will Rohingya Refugees Start Returning to Myanmar in 2018?**

Legislators from lower chamber of Congress and committees on Local Government, Peace, Reconciliation and Unity and Muslim Affairs 5 Dec agreed to organise sub-committee to consolidate Bangsamoro Transition Commission's version of Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) with three other bills on Bangsamoro autonomy. Consolidated draft will be discussed in series of public hearings in select provinces in Mindanao scheduled in Feb. Senate 20 Dec conducted its first session on BBL, to continue early 2018. President Duterte 19 Dec said BBL unlikely to surmount constitutional barriers. Congress 13 Dec overwhelmingly approved Duterte's request to extend martial law in Mindanao until 31 Dec 2018, citing need to eradicate Islamic State (ISIS)-influenced and local terrorist groups as well as Communist Party of the Philippines-New Peoples' Army (NPA). Authorities remain on high alert for possible lone-wolf style attacks in Mindanao, and reports that remnants of Maute group and other extremists now aggressively recruiting new fighters. Military 17 Dec recruited 300 fighters from indigenous peoples (IP) groups as part of militia against NPA. UN-appointed experts on Internally Displaced Persons and IPs, local NGOs and

opposition lawmakers raised concerns that martial law will lead to human rights violations by state forces. Military operations 21-23 Dec in North Cotabato killed eleven members of ISIS-inspired Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) faction under Esmael Abdulmalik alias Abu Toraiife; govt tagged Toraiife as former militant leader Isnilon Hapilon's possible successor. Another BIFF faction 27 Dec killed chieftain from indigenous Teduray tribe as retaliation for military's 25 Dec airstrikes that killed at least ten BIFF fighters in Maguindanao. NPA southern Mindanao 26 Dec said ready to face Duterte's "full-scale-war" in 2018. Tropical storm Tembin (local name Vinta) 22-24 Dec unleashed landslides and flash floods in Mindanao that left over 200 dead and over 138,000 displaced. Govt 27 Dec turned over first batch of 500 transitional homes to Marawi residents that lived in main area of battle; Marawi mayor said around 19,000 individuals have returned to their homes after military clearing operations.

➔ South China Sea DECEMBER 2017

U.S. 18 Dec announced new "America First" National Security Strategy that said Russia and China "challenge American power, influence and interests", and identified China's militarisation in South China Sea (SCS) as behaviour of "revisionist power" that challenges regional status quo. Strategy also highlighted problematic "gray zone" activities such as China's use of coast guard vessels to assert influence and maintain presence, and reiterated importance of quadrilateral cooperation with Australia, India and Japan, as well as alliances and partnerships with ASEAN member states. Follows Australian foreign policy white paper 21 Nov calling for stronger alliance in Indo-Pacific to defend U.S. regional dominance and balance against China, particularly in SCS, and criticised China's island-building activities as "major fault line in the regional order". U.S. navy 19 Dec announced plans to increase its presence in SCS; China said "U.S. ought to adapt to and accept China's development". China 2 Dec said its domestically-built Y-9 transport aircraft had completed first long-distance exercise over SCS, including simulated airdrop; 15 Dec announced new satellite remote sensing plan, including ten additional satellites to be launched by 2021; 24 Dec tested world's largest amphibious aircraft. Washington-based Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative's 14 Dec report on China's SCS development activities counted 29 hectares of new infrastructure in 2017, mostly in Spratlys and Paracels, including several radar facilities, missile shelters and hangars, as well as aircraft deployments; in response, Philippines FM Alan Peter Cayetano 15 Dec said Vietnam, Malaysia and Philippines have also been building their SCS presence.

➔ Thailand DECEMBER 2017

Govt linked late Nov discovery of weapons cache in field outside Bangkok to alleged conspiracies to launch political

violence; Deputy PM and Defence Minister General Prawit Wongsuwan and Army Chief General Chalermchai Sittisat 5 Dec stated that under circumstances, not right time to lift political activities ban. Democrat Party spokesman Wirat Kalayasiri accused regime of using cache as “excuse to delay elections”. Prawit on defensive after photos surfaced showing him wearing expensive watches and jewellery that do not appear on his assets disclosure form. Regime continued to harass its critics, bringing sedition charges against former Pheu Thai Party spokesperson Lieutenant Sunisa Loetphakhawat for critical Facebook posts. EU 11 Dec agreed to restore “political contacts at all levels” with coup-installed regime, having suspended normal relations after army seized power in May 2014; said change was “to facilitate meaningful dialogue on issues of mutual importance, including on human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the road toward democracy”; added that negotiations for free trade agreement will resume only after political rights are restored and “democratically elected civilian government” returned to power. Regime officials and supporters hailed move as EU endorsement of “special situation” in Thailand. Heavy rains and flooding in many parts of deep south contributed to lull in insurgent attacks. Attacks on 25 Dec, including bombings of electricity pylons, led to blackouts in parts of Yala and Pattani. Royal Gazette 28 Nov announced extension of Internal Security Act (ISA) in parts of Pattani and Songkhla provinces for another year; in force for almost ten years, ISA gives officials authority to ban anyone from entering areas declared off-limits and prohibit people from leaving their property.

➔ Papua New Guinea DECEMBER 2017

UN refugee agency 22 Dec accused Australia of abandoning some 800 refugees and asylum seekers following Nov closure of Manus Island detention centre. Court 15 Dec granted asylum seekers who were held at Australian detention centre on Manus Island right to sue govt.

Europe & Central Asia

➔ Bosnia And Herzegovina DECEMBER 2017

Parliament 15 Dec passed long-delayed laws on road tolls and excise taxes, prompting IMF and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to unblock major loan disbursements. President of Republika Srpska (RS) entity Milorad Dodik 14 Dec said RS will not engage in activities to implement country’s NATO Membership Action Plan, citing entity’s Oct declaration on military neutrality; state-level officials said Dodik has no jurisdiction over the issue, work is done at state level, not by entities, thus his statements have no consequences for activities

undertaken by defence ministry.

➔ Kosovo DECEMBER 2017

New govt commission mandated to reassess controversial border deal with Montenegro 11 Dec said agreement was damaging to Kosovo's national interests, not in line with previous boundary line; along with progress against corruption, ratification of border demarcation agreement is one of EU's criteria for visa-free travel. U.S. and EU late Dec condemned attempt by MPs from governing coalition 22 Dec to hold a vote to repeal law allowing new special court at The Hague to prosecute alleged war crimes by members of Kosovo Liberation Army during 1998-1999 war; court is expected to issue first indictments soon. U.S. said international support for Kosovo's independence was built on idea of court dealing with war crimes, any wavering of this commitment would be bad for Kosovo and its relations with U.S.; EU called initiative to abolish court "terrible and harmful to Kosovo". President Thaci in 27 Dec interview called new court "historic injustice" and said he would sign any such legislation if passed by parliament.

➔ Macedonia DECEMBER 2017

UN mediator Matthew Nimetz met with Macedonian and Greek negotiators in Brussels 11-12 Dec to resume talks over ongoing dispute over use of name of Macedonia; last talks were in Nov 2014. Nimetz 12 Dec said issue "can and should be resolved" in 2018, atmosphere at meetings "much better". PM Zaev spent New Year's Eve in unofficial capacity in northern Greek city Thessaloniki, seen by some as sign of growing rapprochement. During first ever visit by a Macedonian PM to Kosovo, PM Zaev agreed to push for international investigation into May 2015 Kumanovo shootout in which more than twenty people were killed, and for which several Kosovo citizens were convicted in Nov; Zaev said issue "should not be a barrier" between the two countries. Opposition VMRO-DPMNE party appointed new leader Hristijan Mickoski after former PM Nikola Gruevski resigned.

➔ Armenia DECEMBER 2017

Following late Nov signing of Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement with EU – first to be signed with a country that is also a member of the Eurasian Economic Union – President Sargsyan 14 Dec said Armenia would receive visa-free travel with EU in two-to-three years, although many observers expressed doubt over whether this will happen within this time period.

➔ Azerbaijan DECEMBER 2017

Baku court 28 Dec sentenced twelve men to jail terms of twelve to fifteen years for terrorism, calling for overthrow of govt, and inciting hatred; men all arrested during late 2015 raids in village of Nardaran outside Baku.

➔ Georgia DECEMBER 2017

Parliament 21 Dec officially endorsed new cabinet, despite heated debates in parliament and calls from opposition for more robust reforms and functional governance. Tbilisi 19 Dec announced that it signed contract with Swiss company to start implementing cargo monitoring of trade through breakaway regions, but only if Russia agrees to sign document. Georgian PM Kvirikashvili 19 Dec proposed to elevate level of participants in Geneva talks, main negotiation platform that allows Georgian and Russian sides to discuss security and humanitarian issues since 2008 war; said he and his foreign minister would be ready to take part in regular talks. Prominent Abkhaz war veteran Pavel Ardzinba shot dead with his driver 13 Dec; motives unclear. Abkhazia de facto parliament 28 Dec failed in its no confidence vote in current de facto PM.

➔ Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan) DECEMBER 2017

During 7 Dec meeting, Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers were not able to reach final agreement allowing expansion of office of Personal Representative of OSCE Chairman-in-Office, under debate since soon after April 2016 escalation and seen by Armenian side as precondition for launching detailed substantive talks, including on return of lands, future status of conflict region and security guarantees. Sides expected to meet again in Jan and agree on adding several more “field assistants” to special representatives’ office in region, but disagree on their location. Foreign ministers of OSCE Minsk group co-chair countries (Russia, France and U.S.) 7 Dec issued special statement: supported resumed and intensified diplomacy, called for agreement on expansion of special representatives’ office, and urged sides to look for compromise on “substantial issues of political settlement”; said further delays will complicate situation and could call into question commitment to reach lasting agreement. Amid intensified diplomacy, month saw low number of incidents and rare shootings at Line of Contact, with Armenia and Azerbaijan reporting two military casualties 11 and 14 Dec. President Sargsyan 1-4 Dec went to NK to inspect local military and watch war games reportedly involving more 1,000 soldiers, dozens of tanks, armoured vehicles and artillery systems, as well as what an Armenian military official called a major new type of weapon. In 14 Dec interview, Sargsyan said there could be no peace process without pacified situation in conflict zone. President Aliyev 21 Dec continued to speak about no status outside of Azerbaijan for NK and need to fully restore Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity.

➔ Russia/North Caucasus DECEMBER 2017

Several people reported killed in counter-terrorism operations and clashes between militants and security forces in North Caucasus republics during month, including: suspected militant reported killed in clash with security forces in Urvan district, Kabardino-Balkaria 15 Dec; five suspected militants reported killed in shootout in Zelenchuksky district, Karachay-Cherkessia 17 Dec. Several militants reported killed in clashes in Dagestan. Security forces 15 Dec conducted raid near Salafi mosque in Dagestan capital Makhachkala, briefly detained some mosque-goers. U.S. 20 Dec announced addition of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov to list of Russians subject to financial and travel sanctions under its 2012 Magnitsky Act, saying he was responsible for torture and extrajudicial killings including of one or more political opponents; four others also added to list, including Chechen security official allegedly involved in early-2017 purge targeting gay and bisexual men. Moscow condemned sanctions as “illegal”. Kadyrov 23 Dec reported his Russian-language Facebook and Instagram accounts had been blocked; Facebook 28 Dec cited legal obligation on them due to U.S. sanctions to disable his accounts. News agency RIA Novosti 4 Dec reported thirteen women from North Caucasus and Southern Federal Districts imprisoned in Baghdad, Iraq, with their children on suspicion of terrorism.

- [OP-ED: What Does Kazakhstan’s New Military Doctrine Reveal about Its Relations with Russia?](#)

Foreign ministry 18 Dec reported it had recalled Moldovan ambassador to Russia for consultations, due to “recent increase of cases of harassment and intimidation of Moldovan officials and politicians by Russian authorities” and lack of official response to “repeated complaints of Moldovan authorities”. Pro-Russian President Dodon condemned decision as “yet another provocation ... aimed at undermining the strategic partnership between our countries”. Earlier in month, head of ruling Democratic Party, Vlad Plahotniuc, accused Russian authorities of “politically motivated persecution” through “fabricated” lawsuits. EU home affairs Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos 20 Dec said Moldova needs to step up efforts to address organised crime and corruption.

Violence in conflict zone increased at beginning of month before falling sharply after Minsk Tripartite Group 20 Dec agreed to renewed ceasefire and prisoner exchange. Kyiv 27 Dec released 233 prisoners in exchange for 73 captives held by Russian-backed separatists. Ceasefire violations involving Minsk-proscribed weapons such as Grads almost tripled from end-Nov to mid-Dec; casualties increased among troops on both sides and civilians, including 24 servicemen reported killed 23 Nov-27 Dec, and at least two civilians reported killed and sixteen injured 1-27 Dec. U.S. special envoy Volker 19 Dec reported 2017 was deadliest year since conflict started; UN 7 Dec reported humanitarian crisis in Donbas at its most severe yet. U.S. and Russian foreign ministers met 7 Dec for further discussion on proposed UN peacekeeping mission for Donbas, but no breakthroughs on role of peacekeepers. During annual telethon 14 Dec, Russian President Putin said Kremlin does not reject principle of international control over Donbas, but insisted on direct negotiation between Kyiv and separatists. U.S. President Trump 12 Dec signed into law defence bill authorising \$350 million military aid to Ukraine, including lethal weapons if Kyiv meets transparency requirements. EU leaders 14 Dec agreed to extend economic sanctions against Russia for six months. Russia 18 Dec withdrew its officers from Joint Center for Coordination and Control, bilateral Ukrainian-Russian entity that monitors Minsk adherence. Moscow blamed Kyiv for preventing Russian officers from fulfilling their duties to mediate between Kyiv troops and Russian-backed separatists; Kyiv accused Kremlin of trying to force it to negotiate with separatists directly. Mounting Western criticism and internal govt disputes led parliament to delay final consideration of Reintegration law, intended to shape reintegration policy toward separatist territories. Amid ongoing attacks on work of anti-corruption bodies, Poroshenko 22 Dec submitted new law to establish anti-corruption court; civil society groups say law does not facilitate judicial independence. Former Georgian President and Odesa Governor Mikheil Saakashvili continued protests calling for presidential impeachment, arrested twice during month. Dozens injured as police and protesters clashed during anti-Poroshenko rally 17 Dec.

- [REPORT: Ukraine: Will the Centre Hold?](#)

➔ Cyprus DECEMBER 2017

Hardline discourse by opponents of Turkish Cypriot leader Akıncı intensified ahead of 7 Jan snap parliamentary elections in north. Turkish Cypriot “Foreign Minister” Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu, known to be one of those opponents, 28 Nov said he was pursuing official recognition of north by U.S. and international community; said “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (“TRNC”) would “not stop its push for independence” since “there were no plans for future peace talks”. Greek Cypriot leader Anastasiades one of nine candidates to formally enter race 28 Dec for presidential election in Republic of Cyprus; first round scheduled for 28 Jan. In 10 Dec interview with Greek newspaper during visit to country, Turkish President Erdoğan said Cyprus reunification talks doomed as long as Greek side did not stop regarding Turkish Cypriots as a minority. Israel and Republic of Cyprus 3 Dec conducted joint military drills on island for third time in 2017, following first “trilateral defence summit” between Israel, Cyprus and Greece in Athens 5 Nov. Anastasiades engaged in efforts to foster ties with neighbouring countries to advance planned energy projects; Republic of Cyprus, Greece, Israel and Italy 5 Dec signed protocol to build world’s longest underwater natural gas pipeline to supply energy to Europe.

➔ Spain DECEMBER 2017

Snap regional election in Catalonia 21 Dec saw three separatist parties gain narrow majority with 51.8% of vote (70 out of 135 seats), though pro-unity Ciudadanos party gained largest share of vote with 25% (37 seats). Deposed former Catalan President Carles Puigdemont’s Together for Catalonia party came second with 21.7% of vote. PM Rajoy 29 Dec called for new Catalan parliament to hold opening session 17 Jan, new president to be selected within ten days from then. Puigdemont, in self-imposed exile in Belgium after a warrant was issued for his arrest unilateral independence referendum in Oct, 24 Dec said he wants to return to Catalonia, and said he was ready to listen to any proposal from Rajoy.

Security operations by Turkish military in south east continued, with lower fatalities – compared to previous month – among security forces and Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) militants, likely due to harsh winter conditions. Fatalities concentrated in rural areas of Şırnak, Mardin and Hatay, and reportedly include some key PKK militants. Crisis Group figures show ratio of militant to security force fatalities went up from 1.3 in 2016 to 3.1 in 2017. PM Yıldırım 1 Dec said security operations had weakened PKK to point where there was “no possibility” for it to recover. Istanbul police 13 Dec announced they foiled alleged PKK-planned attack on Organisation of Islamic Cooperation summit. In continuing crackdown against Kurdish movement and alleged PKK sympathisers, court 1 Dec jailed five Kurdish movement-affiliated DBP (Democratic Regions Party) functionaries in Şanlıurfa on charges of “spreading terrorist propaganda”. President Erdoğan and other officials continued to accuse EU of supporting PKK on various occasions during month. European Parliament 22 Nov endorsed proposal to “systematically deny access to all persons, groups or entities” affiliated with organisations recognised as “terrorist” by EU. EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator late Nov visited Ankara to forge cooperation on countering violent extremism. Tensions with U.S. rose as Ankara condemned U.S. President Trump’s 6 Dec announcement to recognise Jerusalem as capital of Israel. Turkey and U.S. 28 Dec lifted remaining visa restrictions imposed late Oct. Turkey and Russia signed agreement 29 Dec for Russia to supply Turkey with S-400 surface-to-air missiles. Erdoğan 30 Dec said Turkey would do to Kurdish People’s Protection Unit (YPG) in Syria “that we did to Daesh”, and secure its borders. Turkish media 18 Dec reported 781km of planned 911km wall along Turkey’s Syria border completed. Social tensions between refugees and host communities continued, though with fewer reported violent incidents than in previous month.

- **OP-ED: Turkey’s Forays into the Middle East**

Country late Nov took Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) rotating chairmanship; during handover in Minsk, President Nazarbayev met Kyrgyz President Jeenbekov, agreed to help solve border impasse; presidents met again in Astana 25 Dec. Almost 700 miners went on strike at ArcelorMittal-owned coal mine in Shakhtinsk, Karaganda province 11 Dec, demanding inter alia safety improvements and salary increase; regional administration 15 Dec announced 30% salary increase, said miners would not be prosecuted for striking illegally. National Security Committee chair 12 Dec told parliament that authorities prevented eleven terrorist attacks in 2017. U.S. court 20 Dec sentenced Kazakh citizen to fifteen years’ prison for conspiring to support Islamic State (ISIS).

- **OP-ED: What Does Kazakhstan’s New Military Doctrine Reveal about Its Relations with Russia?**

➔ Kyrgyzstan DECEMBER 2017

New President Jeenbekov 13 Dec paid first official visit to Uzbekistan and met with his Uzbek counterpart; sides reported difficult but productive talks, agreed to restore transport links and discussed border delimitation; met with Kazakh president and PM in Astana 25 Dec amid progress on resolving bilateral tensions and border impasse. Security services arrested seven suspected Hizb ut-Tahrir members reportedly seized explosives and extremist literature in Jalalabad province 12 Dec, and arrested eleven more in Bishkek and in Chui and Issyk-Kul provinces 18 Dec. Two men who alleged to have fought in Syria detained in Jalalabad early Dec. Former presidential candidate and opposition figure Omurbek Babanov denounced 19 Dec police raid on his private NTS TV station.

➔ Tajikistan DECEMBER 2017

Colonel killed and four border guards injured in shootout on Afghan border 2 Dec; Tajik authorities said assailants were drug smugglers, urged Afghan side to increase security along border. Lower house 7 Dec passed law forbidding religious political parties. Addressing OSCE conference 7 Dec, Foreign Minister Sirojiddin Aslov discussed Tajik security concerns over surge in terrorist activity in northern Afghanistan and risk posed by fighters from Syria relocating to Afghanistan.

➔ Turkmenistan DECEMBER 2017

Foreign ministry 6 Dec hosted EU delegation; discussed country's macroeconomic and humanitarian situation, reforms of state apparatus, and potential diversification of EU energy deliveries by Turkmen gas supplies. Talks came as country's economic crisis reportedly leading to food shortages in recent weeks. At meeting of Joint Uzbek-Turkmen Intergovernmental Commission on Delimitation and Demarcation of State Border working group in

northern Turkmenistan 1-6 Dec, parties agreed to intensify demarcation work.

→ Uzbekistan DECEMBER 2017

President Mirziyoyev 5 Dec hosted visit by Afghan President Ghani; signed twenty documents related to economic partnership and infrastructure enhancements; discussed terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking and need for increased security on Hairaton Bridge connecting their countries. Uzbekistan and Russia 29 Dec signed nuclear cooperation agreement. President Mirziyoyev 30 Nov signed decree forbidding recognition of confession obtained under torture as legal evidence; 6 Dec announced he supports work of Human Rights Watch. In 22 Dec address to parliament broadcast live on state TV, Mirziyoyev vowed to continue reforms in governance and other areas. Mirziyoyev 19 Dec spoke to U.S. president by phone, discussed reform agenda and cooperation. Parliament 7 Dec passed first reading of bill easing registration for mass media and granting them tax exemptions. Following investigation by International Labor Organization, UN 12 Dec stated child labour no longer systematically used on cotton farms in Uzbekistan, and country taking measures to end use of forced labour among adults.

Latin America & Caribbean

→ Colombia DECEMBER 2017

Attacks by National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group against other illegal armed groups continued in some regions, while Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissident groups continued to expand. Violence rose in Pacific coastal city Tumaco, where two FARC dissident groups are fighting for control; according to some unofficial counts, over 30 people killed in fighting during Dec. Sharp increase in armed attacks in Norte de Santander department during Dec, along border with Venezuela, attributed principally to Popular Liberation Army (EPL), dissident guerrilla group from 1990s peace process that is linked to drug trade. Amid slow progress in peace negotiations with ELN, govt's lead negotiator resigned along with three other negotiators; govt 20 Dec named former Vice President Gustavo Bell new chief negotiator. ELN 25 Dec withdrew from ceasefire verification mechanism that included itself, UN, govt and Catholic Church officials, citing govt bad faith and failure to verify potential violations. ELN announced that it is willing to sign new, improved ceasefire after reviewing current one after it ends on 9 Jan. Gaitán Self-defence Forces (AGC) 11 Dec released communiqué announcing indefinite unilateral ceasefire to begin 13 Dec. Gesture seen as positive move toward eventual collective surrender, however some observers questioned how effective it would be and how internally cohesive AGC is. Govt responded stating it

would not stop fight against AGC. UN 21 Dec reported over 100 human right defenders killed during 2017, mostly in areas formerly under FARC control. Executive and legislative branches of govt in disagreement over approval of law that would create sixteen special voting districts in areas affected by armed conflict; courts will rule on issue, likely in Jan. Law would be eleventh to pass under Fast Track legislative mechanism for laws related to implementation of FARC peace agreement; govt had originally sought to pass some 30 laws before expiration of mechanism on 30 Nov.

➔ Venezuela DECEMBER 2017

Govt won 308 of 335 mayoral posts at stake in municipal elections 10 Dec; most main parties boycotted vote. Electoral authority (CNE) claimed 47% turnout, opposition and many independent analysts said it was much lower. Non-accredited election observers reported widespread evidence of coercion, vote-buying, violation of voting secrecy and electoral propaganda in vicinity of polling stations. Govt used so-called carnet de la patria (homeland identity card), which links access to state benefits with loyalty to ruling party, to reward voters who presented their cards to party representatives after voting. Talks held between govt and opposition representatives in Dominican Republic 1-2 Dec and 15 Dec, in presence of foreign guarantor countries; the two sides agreed to meet again 12 Jan. 44 political prisoners released 23-24 Dec, reportedly as result of agreement reached at talks, although officially 80 were to be released. Part of opposition continues to demand dissolution of unconstitutional National Constituent Assembly before talks are held. Dozens of managers of Citgo, U.S. refining arm of state oil corporation PDVSA, and of PDVSA itself, arrested starting late Nov in what govt described as anti-corruption drive; prominent detainees include former Energy Minister Eulogio del Pino and former PDVSA chairman Nelson Martínez. Ambassador to UN Rafael Ramírez, formerly leading regime figure who was oil minister and PDVSA chair under late President Chávez, forced to resign as UN ambassador 4 Dec but escorted into exile, from where he denied charges and issued series of statements blaming Maduro for crisis. Many independent observers regard purge as bid by President Maduro to eliminate potential rival in Ramírez.

➔ Guatemala DECEMBER 2017

Ombudsman's office and UNESCO 30 Nov demanded urgent action from govt to protect journalists. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein 20 Nov expressed concern over threats, smear campaign and harassment affecting Ombudsman Jordan Rodas, increasing after Rodas' legal action successfully blocked President Jimmy Morales' order to expel International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) Commissioner Iván Velásquez 27 Aug.

Political crisis following highly contentious 26 Nov general elections continued, with further deadly clashes between opposition supporters and police, and spike in criminal violence. Roadblocks, pot-banging protests, and attacks on businesses across country continued intermittently throughout Dec. Amnesty International 8 Dec reported at least fourteen killed in post-electoral repression; later reports ranged from at least seventeen killed to at least 30. Human rights experts from the UN and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights condemned the killing of at least twelve in addition to scores injured and the detention of hundreds, including in military facilities, where some were reportedly subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment. Govt 1 Dec declared state of emergency and curfew, suspended it 6 Dec. Police declared two-day strike 4-5 Dec that ended after agreement with govt on wages. Electoral Supreme Court 17 Dec declared final results with incumbent President Hernández winner, prompting escalation in violent incidents. Opposition refused to accept result, but 20 Dec accepted invitation to talks as it tries to negotiate greater presence in key state institutions. Both EU and Organization of American States (OAS) electoral observation missions recorded abuses during electoral process; EU electoral mission 18 Dec declared allegations of fraud during vote count had no basis in fact; OAS 17 Dec recommended election be held again, contrary to position of U.S., which 22 Dec recognised Hernández victory. Anti-corruption unit in attorney general's office and OAS-backed Mission Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH) 12 Dec announced five lawmakers accused of embezzlement. Security Ministry 10 Dec confirmed fall in homicides Jan-Nov 2017 by 27% compared to same period in 2016.

- [COMMENTARY: Do the Numbers Lie? Mistrust and Military Lockdown after Honduras' Disputed Poll](#)

Nine people killed in two separate massacres in west 17-18 Dec, including military officer; these and other killings resulted in nearly 35% increase in homicides compared with previous month according to police figures. Ahead of local and legislative elections scheduled for March, potential disruption of polls by gangs in spotlight again after attorney general 21 Nov declared that govt officials had been in communication with gangs; Minister of Justice and Public Security denied. Govt 19 Dec finally recognised existence of forced displacement in El Salvador; Minister Landaverde announced govt preparing protection protocols for victims. Followed 13 Dec report by attorney general for human rights which counted 138 cases affecting 458 victims 2016-2017, declaring "national problem". Official data 23 Nov showed number of gang members deported back to El Salvador had increased by 102% in 2017 from

previous year, with over 1,000 arriving over past eleven months.

- [REPORT: El Salvador's Politics of Perpetual Violence](#)

→ Haiti DECEMBER 2017

Dominican Republic continued to expel and arrest Haitians: 5 Dec arrested 555 Haitians illegally residing in northern region Puerto Plata; 8 Dec announced it had expelled over 10,000 Haitians during Nov alone. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) 15 Dec announced 1.32 million Haitians still facing food insecurity; almost 13,000 new cholera cases Jan-Nov 2017, with 141 deaths, down by a third from 2016.

→ Mexico DECEMBER 2017

Presenting preliminary findings from visit to five Mexican states, special rapporteurs for freedom of expression of UN and Organization of American States 4 Dec said violence and fear suffered by Mexican journalists even worse than Syria and other countries affected by war and/or authoritarian regimes. Two journalists killed in Dec: Gumaro Pérez Aguilando killed in front of classroom full of children during Christmas celebration in Acayucan, Veracruz state (south) 19 Dec; popular social media figure Juan Luis Lagunas Rosales murdered in bar in Jalisco state (south west) after publishing video insulting leader of Cartel Jalisco New Generation. Dozens of people killed in Michoacán (south west), including two state police killed in Aguililla 6 Dec. Bodies of six men found hanging from bridges over major roads in Los Cabos resort area of Baja California Sur state (west) 20 Dec. Concerns grew over difficulties faced by govt in advancing police reforms that would enable gradual withdrawal of troops from public security activities, as Congress 15 Dec approved Law of Internal Security, normalising use of armed forces in public security – against advice of UN high commissioner for human rights and almost every national, regional and international human rights body, and in face of protests and fierce political opposition.

Middle East & North Africa

U.S. President Trump's 6 Dec declaration that U.S. recognises Jerusalem as Israel's capital set back peace process, triggered protests by Palestinians that led to killings by Israeli forces, and rise in rocket launches from Gaza to Israel and Israeli strikes on Gaza. Trump said U.S. was not taking position on "final status issues" including "specific boundaries of the Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem", while U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman, attending event in occupied East Jerusalem, said he was in "Jerusalem, the holy city and the capital of the State of Israel". Israel welcomed declaration, but Palestinians, who claim East Jerusalem as capital of future Palestinian state, and international community condemned it. At specially convened Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) summit in Turkish capital Ankara, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Abbas 13 Dec said Palestinians no longer accept U.S. role in peace process because it is "biased toward Israel" and OIC countries recognised East Jerusalem as Palestine's capital. U.S. 18 Dec vetoed UN Security Council resolution introduced by Egypt demanding reversal of decision, which fourteen other Security Council members endorsed. President Abbas 22 Dec said that Palestinians "will not accept any plan" from U.S.. Palestinians protested throughout West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem clashing with Israeli security forces; latter 15 Dec reportedly killed four Palestinians during protests in Gaza and West Bank. Two Gazans killed in protests against Israel 22 Dec. Palestinian 10 Dec stabbed Israeli security guard in Jerusalem; Palestinian 15 Dec stabbed Israeli border police officer in Ramallah. Following Trump's announcement non-Hamas militants in Gaza fired at least two dozen rockets at Israel; Israel responded with repeated strikes against Hamas, including 8 Dec strike that killed two Hamas members. Reconciliation between rival Palestinian factions Fatah and Hamas stalled; PA maintained sanctions on Gaza imposed early 2017.

- **OP-ED: Encouraging the Knesset's Right Wing**

International Criminal Court 11 Dec said it would refer Jordan to UN Security Council for hosting Sudanese President Bashir in March, whom Jordan as signatory to Rome Statute is required to arrest.

After announcing his resignation early Nov from Saudi capital Riyadh, PM Hariri 5 Dec withdrew resignation saying “all political components” of govt decided to “dissociate themselves from all conflicts, disputes, wars or the internal affairs” of Arab countries to preserve Lebanon’s stability. Interior minister 15 Dec set legislative elections for 6 May 2018, to be first such elections for almost ten years and first in which Lebanese expats can vote. 92,821 expats had registered to vote by 20 Nov deadline; FM Gebran Bassil 22 Dec said he had submitted draft law to extend deadline until 15 Feb 2018.

- [OP-ED: Lebanon Needs Help to Revive its Waning Welcome to Syrian Refugees](#)

📌 Syria DECEMBER 2017

In north west, regime and aligned forces escalated attacks with Russian air support to take areas around Khanasser (southern Aleppo province) and Abu Dali (northern Hama province) held by jihadist alliance Hei’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and other rebel groups. Cooperation increased among jihadist groups: Ahrar al-Sham joined defence against pro-regime forces 14 Dec following prisoner exchange with HTS, and HTS released several prominent figures affiliated to al-Qaeda. HTS-dominated “salvation govt” in Idlib warned aspiring opposition administration “Syrian Interim Govt” based in Turkey and Turkish-controlled areas north of Aleppo to close its offices in areas under HTS control, as part of broader HTS effort to consolidate control. In south west, fighting continued between pro-regime forces and rebels around rebel-held Beit Jinn enclave near border with Lebanon and Israeli-controlled Golan; amid regime gains, rebels and families 29 Dec began evacuating enclave under surrender deal to opposition-held areas in Idlib and Daraa. Israel increased strikes on pro-regime targets, including 1 Dec missile attack against reportedly Iranian-operated base south of Damascus. In Damascus, pro-regime forces backed by Russian airstrikes continued to intensify siege and bombardment of Eastern Ghouta suburb following offensive launched mid-Nov by rebels not party to de-escalation deal in place there; regime 26 Dec agreed to allow medical evacuations of 29 critically ill patients from besieged area in return for rebel faction Jaish al-Islam’s release of 29 detainees. In east, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and govt-aligned forces neared end of race along opposite sides of Euphrates River to seize oil and gas resources and population centres from Islamic State (ISIS) as both reached Iraqi border; ISIS retained control of small pockets and continued to launch small-scale attacks against pro-regime targets. Little progress made in latest round of UN-mediated talks in Geneva, which concluded 14 Dec; UN envoy said govt not attempting to enter dialogue with opposition. UN envoy 22 Dec said Iran, Turkey and Russia had set up working group on release of detainees held by govt. Some 40 rebel groups 25 Dec rejected Russia’s proposed conference on Syria in Sochi late Jan, alleging that Russia was trying to bypass Geneva process.

- [OP-ED: A Likely Story](#)

Tens of thousands protested against govt in several cities 28-31 Dec and clashes with security forces reportedly left at least thirteen protestors dead. Protests against price rises and economic stagnation in city of Mashhad 28 Dec spread to other towns and cities, with protestors criticising govt corruption and some calling for Supreme Leader Khamenei to step down. Crowds attacked state buildings in capital Tehran 30 Dec. President Rouhani 31 Dec said people had right to criticise authorities but warned govt would not tolerate those who use violence. U.S. President Trump expressed support for protestors and warned Tehran that “the world is watching”. U.S. Congress let pass 13 Dec deadline for re-imposing on Iran sanctions waived under July 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA); deadline triggered by U.S. President Trump’s 13 Oct non-certification of Iran’s compliance with nuclear deal. JCPOA Joint Commission members, including U.S., emphasised their commitment to deal in Vienna 13 Dec. U.S. House of Representatives 14 Dec passed bill requiring Treasury to “make certifications with respect to U.S. and foreign financial institutions’ aircraft-related transactions involving Iran”. Iranian officials 6 Dec denounced Trump’s decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. Iran rejected claims by U.S. ambassador to UN 14 Dec that Iran had provided military support to Yemeni Huthi rebels.

Security forces 9 Dec completed offensive launched late Nov to clear remaining Islamic State (ISIS) fighters from desert areas in west of Anbar province near Syrian border; PM Abadi same day declared “final victory” against jihadist group. During official celebrations in Baghdad, Abadi praised contribution of Shia Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) but omitted to mention role of Kurdish Peshmerga. At meeting with Kurdish leaders French President Macron 2 Dec said all militias, particularly PMUs, should be “gradually dismantled”; VP Maliki rejected call as “unacceptable interference”. Abadi 15 Dec said govt had begun effort to bring all arms under state control and top Shia cleric Ali Sistani same day called for PMUs to be integrated into federal security forces and for members to hand weapons to state; all PMU factions pledged to do so. Several PMU commanders mid-Dec announced dissolution of their military groups in apparent preparation to run in legislative elections scheduled for May 2018. Relations between federal govt and Kurdish Regional Govt (KRG) remained at impasse; Baghdad maintained international flight ban on Kurdish capital Erbil. KRG 13 Dec announced further cuts to state salaries, prompting protests across Suleimaniya province in east: protesters demanded KRG’s resignation and 18 Dec reportedly set fire to several political party offices near Suleymaniyah city; Kurdish security forces 19 Dec reportedly killed three people during protests in Ranya. UN Security Council 8 Dec lifted remaining “Food-for-Oil” sanctions, imposed on Iraq in Aug 1990 following Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait.

→ Kuwait DECEMBER 2017

Govt 12 Dec announced formation of new cabinet, delayed by political infighting. Gulf Cooperation Council summit in Kuwait City 5 Dec, which lasted one day instead of two as planned, failed to ease dispute between Saudi-led bloc and Qatar; blockading countries Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain sent only ministerial-level delegations.

→ Qatar DECEMBER 2017

Gulf Cooperation Council summit in Kuwait City 5 Dec, which lasted one day instead of two as planned, failed to ease dispute between Saudi-led bloc and Qatar; blockading countries Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain sent only ministerial-level delegations.

→ Saudi Arabia DECEMBER 2017

Following U.S. President Trump's 6 Dec announcement that U.S. recognises Jerusalem as capital of Israel, al-Qaeda 9 Dec released audio message from Hamza bin Laden, son of former leader Osama bin Laden, calling Muslims to contest rule of al-Saud family. Gulf Cooperation Council summit in Kuwait City 5 Dec failed to ease dispute between Saudi-led bloc and Qatar.

⚡ Yemen DECEMBER 2017

Collapse of alliance between Huthis and supporters of former President Saleh deepened conflict in north, as both Saudi-led coalition and Huthis looked set to ramp up attacks in Jan. After clashes in capital Sanaa late Nov between Huthi fighters and pro-Saleh forces, Saleh 2 Dec said he would “turn a new page” with Saudi-led coalition and called on followers to turn against Huthis. Huthis killed Saleh in Sanaa 4 Dec. In following weeks, Huthis tightened control of Sanaa, cracking down on Saleh’s family members and his General People’s Congress (GPC) party. Huthis 19 Dec fired missile at Riyadh, Saudi govt intercepted. Saudi-led coalition significantly increased airstrikes in north; UN reported airstrikes killed at least 115 civilians in four northern provinces 6-16 Dec and 109 more 18-28 Dec. United Arab Emirates (UAE)-backed Yemeni forces made military gains against Huthis: captured Khawka port on Red Sea coast 7 Dec and town of Bayhan, Shebwa province, Huthis’ last foothold in south 15 Dec. Saudi Arabia and UAE leaders met Yemeni Islamist party Islah in Riyadh 13 Dec. Saudi Arabia maintained blockade on Yemen despite U.S. call 6 Dec to let through humanitarian and commercial goods. Saudi-led coalition 20 Dec said it would allow relief and commercial goods through Hodeidah port for at least 30 more days.

- **COMMENTARY: [The Killing of Former President Saleh Could Worsen Yemen’s War](#)**

➔ Algeria DECEMBER 2017

Army arrested five people possessing weapons on behalf of terrorist groups in Batna 5 Dec. Former mayor of Stah Guentis in Tebessa province sentenced to five years in prison 10 Dec for complicity with jihadist group al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

⚡ Egypt DECEMBER 2017

Following terror attack on Bir al-Abed mosque in North Sinai 23 Nov, military stepped up operations against

jihadists and Islamic State (ISIS) and other militants launched multiple attacks on military and civilian targets. ISIS claimed missile attack on military airbase near Arish, North Sinai 19 Dec targeting interior and defence ministers, one military officer killed. Next day security forces conducted raids to arrest militants near Arish, five suspected militants and one army officer killed. ISIS claimed 28 Dec attack on bank in Arish, North Sinai that killed two people. Army vehicle triggered bomb during raid on militant position in North Sinai 28 Dec, one officer and five soldiers killed. In attacks claimed by ISIS on Coptic Orthodox church and Christian-owned shop near Cairo, gunman 29 Dec killed eleven people. Security forces 18 Dec killed five suspected militants and arrested ten others in raids in Alexandria province in north west and Qalyubiya province north of Cairo. Security forces 24 Dec killed nine suspected militants in raid in Sharqiya province in Nile Delta. Govt 30 Dec said security forces killed three suspected militants belonging to Hassm, reportedly Muslim Brotherhood offshoot, during raid in Giza. After former PM and 2012 presidential candidate Ahmed Shafiq late Nov said he intended to run in May 2018 presidential elections but was prevented from returning from UAE, UAE deported him 2 Dec. On arrival in Cairo, military seized him and detained him in hotel incommunicado. Colonel Ahmed Konsowa sentenced to six years in prison 19 Dec after announcing his intention to run in 2018 presidential election while on active duty. Former President Morsi and nineteen others sentenced 30 Dec to three years in prison for insulting judiciary.

🇱🇐 ⚡ Libya DECEMBER 2017

Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, de facto ruler in east, 17 Dec publicly rejected 2015 Libyan Political Agreement (LPA), raising risk of new fighting between his allies in west and forces aligned with UN-backed Govt of National Accord (GNA). In response to claims by Haftar supporters that LPA's two-year validity would expire 17 Dec, UN Security Council 14 Dec emphasised continuity of LPA, rejecting what it said were incorrect deadlines and declaring unacceptable any attempt to undermine UN-facilitated political process. Haftar 17 Dec in televised speech declared LPA and all institutions emanating from it (including GNA) obsolete. Tensions rose in Tripoli and around Sirte between GNA-aligned militias and those supporting Haftar; GNA-affiliated Nawasi armed group in Tripoli rejected Haftar's remarks. Unidentified gunmen 17 Dec killed mayor of Misrata Mohammed Eshtewi. French FM 21 Dec met UN-backed PM Serraj in Tripoli and Haftar in Benghazi in bid to revive stalled UN-led talks. Unidentified assailants blew up crude oil pipeline about 130km south of Es Sider terminal in east 26 Dec. In east, Haftar's forces 28 Dec retook last district of Benghazi under control of Islamist fighters. UN 19 Dec said it plans to move up to 10,000 illegal migrants from Libya to African countries and possibly European countries and Canada in 2018.

- **COMMENTARY:** [New Risks in Libya as Khalifa Haftar Dismisses UN-backed Accord](#)

➡ Tunisia DECEMBER 2017

Army clashed with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb jihadists close to Algerian border 11 Dec, one soldier killed. Small protests held in several places including Le Kram, Tunis province and Mknassi, Sidi Bouzid province 13 Dec, protestors clashed with police. 250 activists and intellectuals 17 Dec (seventh anniversary of start of revolution) called for critical stance toward ruling coalition and for local elections to be held in first trimester of 2018. European ministries of finance 5 Dec released list of seventeen tax haven countries, including Tunisia; negotiations to remove country from list ongoing. Election commission 16 Dec said local elections would be held 6 May 2018.